



INTERVIEW WITH CHEE KEONG CHEUNG ON HIS HK ACTION FILM DEBUT

13TH FEBRUARY 2009

INTRODUCTION

It took *Cheung Chee Keong*, a UK-born and bred film-maker from Hong Kong decent, about eight years to make his first movie in HK. Judging by the end result, the wait wasn't vain.

After graduating in Film and Video at the Surrey Institute of Art and Design, Cheung founded in 1999 the film production company Intense productions in Lancaster, a small town in the North West of England. He has since written, produced, directed, consulted and advised on numerous local and international mainly drama-orientated projects, short films, music promos and feature films. It was just a matter of time before Cheung stepped in the world of action films.

This new step didn't come until 2006 though, when, with the help of Mark Strange and Mike Leeder among others, he made *Underground* on a shoe-string budget. Shot entirely in Britain, the film showcases the best British martial-arts talents in 13 action set pieces set back to back. The impressive production value, as well as a gritty look, a superb music score (performed by a 15-piece orchestra) and 13 deftly choreographed fights speak volume of Cheung's resourcefulness. The director takes the viewer straight to the final battle royal through various climaxes, dodging the tedious flaws of the pure back-to-back action concept. The relative short running time (87 min.), a never-waning tension and a format blending documentary, Big Brother-like real TV and the tournament film genre helped.

On the heels of *Underground*, and seizing the opportunity to develop more exciting projects with Strange and Leeder, Cheung flew to HK to make his first HK-action style film, *Bodyguard: A New Beginning*. The film is not only Cheung's love letter to the former Crown colony but also a tribute to *John Woo's* past action dramas with *Chow Yun-fat*.

The plot is thus: A Chinese gang boss sees his empire threaten by a new rival in town. He sends a bodyguard to protect a mysterious person in the UK, while cleaning up the mess in his HK gang and, not the least, in his own family. Indeed, *Bodyguard* takes place in the UK and HK and features a mixed cast and crew. The boss played by Richard Ng confronts his very own son (on and off screen), Carl Ng, and a new threat, *Cary-Hiroyuki Tagawa*. The bodyguard, played by the up and coming French/Asian actor Vincent Sze, has to protect Chloe, played by Stephanie Langton. Choreographed by *Anthony Carpio* and *Chan Man-Ching* from the Jackie Chan Stunt Group, the film is co-produced by *Oliver Morran*, Mark Strange, Mike Leeder and Ean Tang and photographed by *Henry Chung* and Steven Priovolos.

All these names have fed our curiosity about this East meets West action drama, which premiered at the Germany Oldenburg International Film Festival in September 2008 and received rave reviews.

We talked with Cheung in his Lancaster office about his inspiration, his two action films and his new film-making experience in the world's capital of action cinema.



A CHINESE/BRITISH FILM-MAKER

HKCinemagic: Your parents are Chinese and you were born in the UK, weren't you? Why did you go to HK for the film?

Chee Keong Cheung: Yes. I was born and raised in the UK. I have family in HK and I go over every three years or so but I'd never had the opportunity to work there. I've always been very intrigued and fascinated by the film industry in HK. Having grown up in the UK and with Chinese parents, it's given me the opportunity to experience two very different cultures, both of which I'm very proud to be part of. It also helps me see things differently. It was always a goal of mine to work in HK and *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* became that vehicle.

HKCinemagic: *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* was your first film in HK and China?

Chee Keong Cheung: Yes. That's right. I was in post production on my first feature, *Underground*, an action tournament film in the UK and I was liaising with a good friend of mine, Mike Leeder who is based in HK and was also an executive producer on *Underground*. I was keen to find a project to work on in HK as my next film and we talked about the possibilities. Growing up, I watched a lot of HK films (in particular, the Triad films) and that inspired this film and provided the opportunity to go over there, reconnect and also make a film that my family could go and watch.

I'd been talking to Richard Ng, who Mike Leeder put me in touch with, and he kindly agreed to help out on Underground but schedules didn't work out. But we kept in touch and we were having Dim Sum in London one day. I grew up watching Richard in the Jackie Chan films in his more comedic roles, which he's well known for, so it was quite surreal experience to meet with him. As we were talking I thought it would be interesting and certainly something different to cast Richard as the Triad Boss and we talked in depth about this and he was certainly intrigued. He shared his experiences of working in HK which was insightful. With Mike in HK, and my UK Co-Producer and actor and also very good friend Mark Strange, we discussed about making the film partly in HK and part in the UK and things started to develop from there, which I was very excited about.



Mark Strange in 'Underground' (2007)

HKCinemagic: I am surprised, you founded your company in 1999, that is ten years ago, and you never thought of making a film in HK sooner.

Chee Keong Cheung: That's a good point. Maybe I should have. I started off directing and producing short films, developing and producing feature films -- more Western projects. Early on, I didn't have contacts and connections in the HK film industry. It's only in the last several years, after moving into the action genre in the UK through my co-producer Mark Strange (which I'm very grateful for), I was led to the HK film scene. Often, I go where the project takes me and they've certainly taken me to some strange and fascinating places. That's one of the great things about the film business. You get to see and experience things one may never expect or consider to experience in life.

HKCinemagic: When you started, what kind of films did you want to do?

Chee Keong Cheung: Dramatic stories were always a passion of mine and telling good stories. This was always something I wanted to do and to make films that could reach audiences, connect with people. Film is such a powerful medium. When I first started it was this intention: to tell stories which entertained, to make people laugh and to make them cry. As time goes on, as a director and producer, I realised making films was and is a business, an industry, and sometimes having a story you want to tell is not enough. Often the timing might not be right given the market place, or, commercially, a project might be too risky. So I came to realise and understand that I needed to balance finding and telling stories but also ensured I looked at the business side in order to succeed in a highly competitive field.

I connected with other producers and directors and soon realised a film made in one country (a comedy for example) may not necessarily travel and cross over to another due to different sensibilities and culture. However, with action, I found this to be a genre that allowed all sort of exciting creative possibilities and that could also travel worldwide at the same time.

Subsequently, I like to work as both a producer and a director as it gives me an understanding of two very different worlds and also helps me to understand the value and importance of both the creative and the business sides of filmmaking. I very much enjoy both processes. As a director and producer I am still learning and honing both sides and I certainly feel collaboration is important. One of the most enjoyable parts of filmmaking is not only the story telling but also the opportunity to collaborate with a group of people to create and realise a vision.



Nathan Lewis and Joey Ansah in 'Underground' (2007)

HKCinemagic: Is it easy to wear these two caps, producer and director?

Chee Keong Cheung: For me, I'm comfortable with both roles, although at times it can be very exhausting. It can certainly be a tricky combination.

HKCinemagic: There is usually a good balance when a director isn't the producer.

Chee Keong Cheung: Absolutely. I also work with other producers, and I appreciate the importance of that relationship and the external guidance and feedback. But personally, I think it is helpful to be able to think or at least have an understanding of a producer when you direct a film and vice versa.

HKCinemagic: For you, things are even more complex as you are the writer for *Underground* and *Bodyguard*. While writing, do you imagine already what will be the directing and producing parts?

Chee Keong Cheung: Yes, with independent films, I always try and write what I feel I can achieve both creatively and logistically. For instance, *Underground* was the film I wanted to make to showcase what I felt was under-represented martial arts talents in the UK. Talking to a lot of the talent, I realised many had worked on big studio films such as *Batman Begins* and *James Bond* to name a few. Often they had very little screen time, maybe dying after ten seconds and their talents were never fully appreciated or realised onscreen. With the help of my co-producer Mark Strange, I wanted to bring these talents together and was excited about making a film as a showcase for them, which I thought would also be interesting for audiences. And from that, I wrote the script to work around the talent that I saw and was available and that vehicle became *Underground*.

One of the great things about independent films is that it provides a great level of creative freedom. With *Underground*, we made a small little film to showcase what could be done with a limited budget, and a film, which I thought, would appeal to the market working in a genre that can travel and translate worldwide.



A scene from 'Underground' (2007)

HKCinemagic: Did you get feedbacks from the UK talents after *Underground*? Did they land bigger jobs?

Chee Keong Cheung: I think all the talent involved really liked and were impressed with what we achieved collectively. It was certainly a challenging shoot but each of the performers really pushed themselves to the limits and gave 110%. Without their commitment the film would not have been possible. Several of the cast went on to work on other projects and move on to bigger things, which I was really pleased to hear. Liang Yang went on to *Golden Compass* and most notably Joey Ansa went on to *Bourne Ultimatum*. Whether it was directly as a result of *Underground*, I don't know but the film certainly showed a lot of people worldwide the talent that existed within the UK.

HKCinemagic: Which filmmaker in the West really influences you?

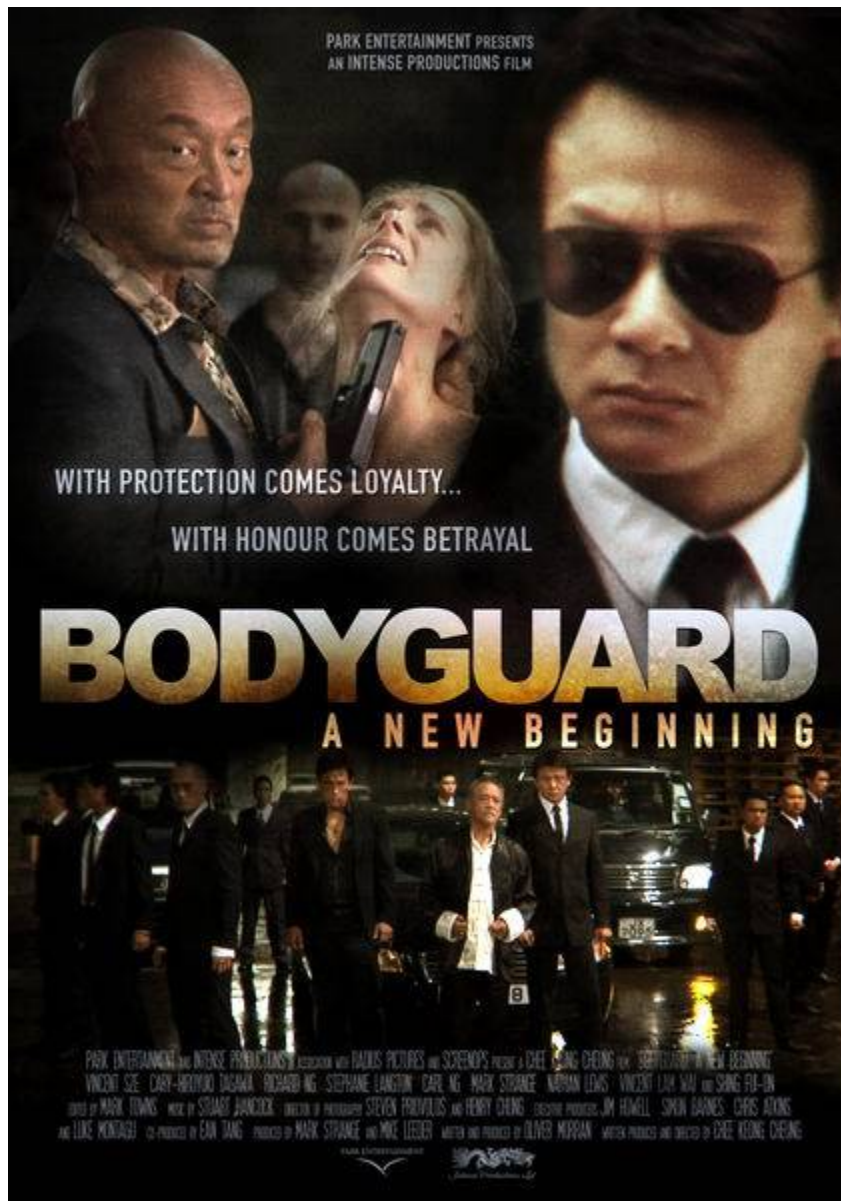
Chee Keong Cheung: Directors such as Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, have been really influential. I really admire their work and storytelling. Others include Mike Figgis for his work on *Leaving Las Vegas* and the performances he drew out of his actors. Then there's also Krzysztof Kieslowski with *Dekalog* and his *Three Colours* trilogy. I really like directors who tell stories in unique ways, with characters and situations that interconnect.

There's certainly a shift in my career from the more drama led projects I've been developing and working on to the action films I'm currently directing and producing and going back to the HK films that I grew up watching.

ON BODYGUARD

HKCinemagic: Indeed, the dramatic and betrayal elements as well as the underworld depiction in *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* remind me of John Woo's films and the 1980s/1990s HK triad films. Were you influenced by Woo for *Bodyguard*?

Chee Keong Cheung: Absolutely. I really admire and respect his work. His character-driven films which deal with themes of loyalty, honour, betrayal and friendship are really intriguing and *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* gave me the opportunity to try and tackle some of these themes. I was always really drawn by the characters in *John Woo's* films and in particular his collaboration with *Chow Yun Fat* on films such as *Better Tomorrow*, *The Killer* and *Hard Boiled*. Chow Yun-Fat as actor is so versatile and has such charisma and screen presence. There was really something special about his [Woo's] films and their collaborations. When growing up, I watched both Western and Asian movies and *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* was my intent to fuse the two and try and connect them together.



HKCinemagic: How do you consider your film? As a HK action film, a British film or a product of the West and the East.

Chee Keong Cheung: It's certainly a combination between the two, a hybrid. I think it's both British and Asian, but a film which also has its own identity. The film is shot in English and Cantonese. That was always my intention and hopefully audiences will like the approach I've taken.

After making *Underground* I wanted to make something different, try and reinvent myself. When I went to HK, I wanted to portray this clash of culture and I wanted to depict both worlds. The film opens in HK and ends in HK, with the middle section taking place in the UK. We go back and forth between the two worlds. I like to think the film is something different and unique.



HKCinemagic: Indeed it is not your typical HK pure action film; there is also betrayal themes and drama.

Chee Keong Cheung: *Underground* had 13 fights in the film and it was pretty much non-stop action and very different to a conventional film. I cast the talents nationwide and tried to work out who would fight who, so it was quite an organic process, and I tried to ensure there was something for everyone in the action and while it was a fiction film, stylistically, I took a more documentary approach to the visual style.

With *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* I suppose you could say it was back to a more conventional narrative storytelling. I tried to create some dynamic characters, situations and stories within the film, which would intertwine and cross over from Wong and his son to the girl and her bodyguard. That was the appealing part of the film and I was keen to try to explore within the film why the characters did what they did.



The film depicts two rival gangs, a long standing triad boss (*Richard Ng*) who has been in power for decades and is respected and a new rival gang boss (*Cary-Hiroiyuki Tagawa*) who comes in to try and take over. Richard Ng's character, Wong, is at a point in his life where he's examining life and looking at what he's achieved and what he has. He's in this strange place where he realises that it's not the life he wanted to live. He's in a contemplative state. Having witnessed so much violence and bloodshed in his lifetime, he's reluctant to see more, and this is seen as a sign of weakness.

His son, Yuen played by *Carl Ng*, wants to take over the business. Wong sees himself in his son and as the film progresses we see a dramatic turn of events. I'd like to think dramatically the film is about understanding and self realisation and about people looking back at what they have done and examining the choices that they've made in life.

AN ECLECTIC CAST

HKCinemagic: The cast is impressive, with actors from all over the world. Mike Leeder helped you assemble it.

Chee Keong Cheung: Thank you. It was real privilege and honour to work with such a diverse array of highly talented actors in both the UK and HK. Mike Leeder was the HK Producer along with Ean Tang and helped to assemble a great HK cast and crew. Mike's certainly a very knowledgeable individual and very supportive of action and Asian cinema and he was a great contributor to the film. Without him, we certainly couldn't have achieved what we did.

I was in touch with *Richard Ng* from *Underground* and it was great to not only have him on board as an actor but also being able to get advice from him on filming in HK as he has such vast experience in HK and China. Richard put his son Carl forward. Mike put me in touch with other local talents, such as *Vincent Sze* who plays Leung, the Bodyguard. I remember having a very long meeting late at night with Vincent and we hit it off.



Other cast from HK included *Shing Fui-On* who I was very excited about working with having been very familiar with his work, in particular in *John Woo's The Killer*. We had *Vincent Lam Wai (Roaring Wheels)* and James Ha (*Crime Story*) who play the gang bosses as well as *Brandon Rhea* who plays a drunken businessman and was seen in *Fearless* alongside *Jet Li*.

I met *Cary-Hiroiyuki Tagawa* at the American Film Market (AFM). He's a very talented actor and has such great screen presence and a large body of work. He's a real great guy. Very gentle individual and very different to the bad guy roles he plays onscreen. We showed him some extracts from *Underground* and he really liked the tone and style of the film as well as what we achieved with limited resources and we kept talking and there was a window he was free. After the *Bodyguard* shoot he went on to take a key role in the *Tekken* film based on the computer game.



Stephanie Langton who plays Chloe, the girl Leung is sent to protect, is from the UK. Stephanie came to an open audition and she just stood out amongst everyone we saw and we had literally hundreds of people applying for that role. After her audition I just kind of knew she'd be right.

As well as acting, I should add Mark Strange was also very integral (as with *Underground*) in bringing together some great UK action talents in his role as producer including Nathan Lewis (who's a three-time kickboxing world champion) who plays one of the hired help in the film.

HKCinemagic: Vincent Sze is a young French man from Asian decent, an up and coming actor in the HK film scene. His international personality was a reason why you cast him as the lead?

Chee Keong Cheung: No, this wasn't the main factor. *Mike Leeder* first put him forward and we had a long meeting in HK and we really connected. I said to myself that he was the right person for the role. I didn't know much about his work beforehand, but felt he was right for the part. There's a strong character there but when you look in his eyes there is also a real vulnerability and I liked that about him. That was something interesting. I think he has real talent and is certainly one to watch out for. His French and Chinese cultural combination was certainly unique. The funny thing, when I was in HK, I directed Vincent Sze in English, and when he was in England I directed him in Chinese.



HKCinemagic: Richard Ng is cast against type, as a gang boss, it is really not the usual part for him. Why did you cast him?

Chee Keong Cheung: Richard's certainly recognised more for his comedy work and playing a triad boss was a role he'd never undertaken before which I think was a real appeal for him. I like unusual casting and like to find actors and offer them unusual roles because I think it offers something fresh for audiences. Richard is an amazing actor. When we were talking he was very serious and I thought to show this side of his persona, maybe a side that people hadn't seen before would be interesting. He is incredibly talented and brings a great wealth of experience to any film he gets involved with and it was great to have the opportunity to work with him. He's very observant.

HKCinemagic: Carl Ng and Richard Ng, son and father, have played together in *Magazine Gap Road* also. Can you talk about their chemistry on screen? I guess on the set their chemistry must be different than on screen...

Chee Keong Cheung: There's certainly a real intensity with both Richard and Carl onscreen, but off screen it's a lot more relaxed. I found there's a strong relationship between both of them and also a great level of respect. They certainly challenge and push each other as actors, but in a positive way. As actors and individuals, they're both very focused and committed and there's certainly an intensity to them as well as a wealth of knowledge. They're both thinkers.

In *Bodyguard: A New Beginning* they play father and son. Carl's character seeks approval from his father and also Boss. Richard's character sees so much of himself in his son, and he's concerned that he'll make the mistakes he made early in his life. Both characters go on interesting journeys throughout the film.



There's one sequence, which was a challenge for both involving Richard's character pointing a gun at his son, Carl. That was certainly an intense and emotional moment.

When directing them, I really tried to push them both emotionally and psychologically. We also worked on some improvisation between the two. I like to work closely with the screenplay, but sometimes I also like things to be organic and at times, there are moments of magic which happen onscreen that you can't predict. At times you never know when it's going to come and it happens when you least expect it. I like to create an environment on set with actors, where they feel they can offer up ideas and suggestions and improvisation certainly allows that. At times, saying a line [in those circumstances] can come across a lot more real than when an actor 'reads' it from the script, or a reaction can come across more real when they actually don't expect something to happen but it happens.

HKCinemagic: Talk about Carl Ng.

Chee Keong Cheung: Carl Ng has a very good screen presence. He's very much a method actor and throws himself into a role. He's also very aware of where the camera is, which is important for film actors in order to perform to the camera and to audiences without making it obvious. This is something I noticed with Richard first. A subtle movement can have such a strong impact on camera and for me this is what makes a film actor.



HKCinemagic: Carl picked it up from his father?

Chee Keong Cheung: I think so. I'm sure Carl's experience as a model has also helped in a positive way. I noticed a real level of respect for each other.

FILM-MAKING IN HK

HKCinemagic: Do you mean you always changed the script on the spot?

Chee Keong Cheung: Not all the time, but sometimes. I like to feel [and incorporate to the story] what the actors will bring and I am open to that. It's a collaborative process. For any film, casting is the key and it's important to allow actors to contribute and offer ideas to their characters. Of course the script is an integral part of any film and forms the blueprint and structure, but I like to have some freedom. The key with the improvisation and any suggestions in my opinion is to ensure that it's in context and the basis is covered: "this is what we need to convey within the script, this is the intention we want to get across."

HKCinemagic: So the completed version of *Bodyguard* was close to the original script or not?

Chee Keong Cheung: I'd say a mixture. Sometimes through choice and other times through production restrictions. Working with a limited budget, we utilised and maximised all the resources available, but of course as with any independent productions there are restrictions and limitations, which sometimes led to cuts to some sequences. This happens unfortunately and one has to find a way around it to ensure the narrative flows. Also some ideas don't necessarily work out as you'd first imagined and need re-working and other scenes work a lot better than first expected. It's certainly an exciting process and journey.



HKCinemagic: It feels a bit like the guerrilla system for which HK filmmakers are known for. They sometimes work from a treatment and change the script as they go.

Chee Keong Cheung: I really like the HK way of film-making. To be honest, it [shooting a film there] was a mean to experience that. Having spent so much time in the West and making films here [in the UK], [the HK way] it's a different way of thinking. I find myself adapting to adjust to that, the environment and the way to make it work. It only gives you a lot more freedom. It was interesting and it took me a little bit of time to adapt. I speak Cantonese but not overly fluent. *Cary-HiroYuki Tagawa* is American, *Stephanie Langton* is English and neither speak Chinese, *Richard Ng* and *Carl Ng* both speak English and Chinese. It was a strange mix because [in HK] I talked to my co-producer, Ean Tang and my DOP [Henry Chung] in English and to my AD [Ma Siu Ling] and to some actors like *Shing-Fui On* in Chinese. So it was a mixture and I was constantly switching language. On the first day I spoke in English and soon realised that some of the crew and cast didn't understand fully what I was saying. So I had to repeat all in Chinese (as best as I could). But when you say something in English it doesn't always translate well into Chinese. It can be a bit more discursive in the West; you can talk about mood and feels and looks. It's less like that in HK I think and sometimes things can get lost in translation.

In HK, I personally found it to be more direct, it is a lot more like "what do you need? What do you want?" There's no messing about and they implement it quickly. I think it's different from crews in the West but that's just my opinion. Both approaches are valid and there's no right or wrong way to make a film. I found the HK crew were some of the most professional, efficient and hardworking I've ever had the opportunity to work with but that's not to say the West aren't.

HKCinemagic: Having said that, the DOP Henry Chung and the producer Mike Leeder are both used to the HK way. They helped you I take it.

Chee Keong Cheung: Working with all of them absolutely helped and working as a director, you kind of have to adapt. You need everyone to understand your vision irrespective of the country you're in, you need to bring everyone on the same page and you need to maximise time. Yet, this challenge of communication and different styles and approaches is universal, in any country that can happen and one needs to embrace that. As a director, the key is to convey your ideas to your team to create the environment to tell the story.

We shot for about two weeks in HK. It's a different pace than in the UK. It was certainly an intense shoot and hopefully people will be impressed with what we achieved.



Mike Leeder and his Co-producer Ean Tang really made the HK shoot possible. As I mentioned earlier, they brought so many talented individuals together both in front and behind the camera and to have their experience and the experience of the crew for the film was great. Henry Chung has a great eye. The HK sequences he photographed were very visual and vibrant.

I noticed, when you live in London, you take London for granted. So often you don't tend to show all of London or maybe forget to in a film. In HK, I wanted to film these big exteriors [representative of the HK cityscape], yet similar, for people living in HK, it's just HK so maybe to some degree they also take it for granted.

When I was in HK, I would see a location, like a rooftop or a street and would go "OK, we don't need any dressing here." The place [itself] adds some production value. Like someone in the street pushing a trolley, I like to keep that on camera, rather than clearing it. From my point of view, that's what made the film more fresh and unique. As a director I always look at ways to maximise what is available and also give the film more production value and make the film look bigger than it is. When working with a limited budget this is particularly important and you want to show off the diverse and eclectic mix of locations.

HKCinemagic: So it was very much the HK guerrilla style... Did you film in crowded area on the sly or actually cleared the streets?

Chee Keong Cheung: For the action sequences and logistical and health and safety reasons we had to ensure there was a clear set. However, there were certainly times we would take a more guerrilla approach and travel around HK with a minimal crew following *Vincent Sze*, and Stephanie Langton, with the real public walking across frame, crossing streets, as they are roaming and being chased through the markets. There were no problems, which was great. It was certainly chaotic at times, but it made things more authentic and less staged and these were definitely some of the most enjoyable days. In HK, they are quick at adapting and they are quick to get things done with no hassle. And I liked that.

FILMING ACTION

HKCinemagic: Anthony Carpio and Chan Man-Ching from the Jackie Chan Stunt Group handled the action. How did you work with them? Did they have carte blanche or on the contrary you were very involved in every action scene design?

Chee Keong Cheung: Working with them was certainly a great experience. They have a great deal of experience between them and are very respected within the industry and I learnt so much from them. It was great seeing their approach to the action from conceptualisation to the execution.

I'd sit and talk to them about my thoughts on what I wanted to achieve within each of the action scenes and then they'd start putting and devising some of the sequences for me to see. I'd then comment and work with them to adapt it. As a director, I'm quite hands on and we worked very closely. Obviously they are hugely experienced at what they do and I also wanted to give them the freedom to be able to undertake that. The finale in the film in particular was very special.



HKCinemagic: Usually in HK, a director does the drama, and the action director does the action.

Chee Keong Cheung: It was interesting as that separation was something I didn't really know until I got to HK. As a director I like to be very hands on. However, when I get involved in the action, there's certainly no disrespect intended. I get involved with all aspects and tend to go over and direct the extras at times, and my AD would say I don't need to do that. I hope I help but sometimes I might just be a nuisance. The key for me was to interweave the action and the drama.

Anthony Carpio and Chan Man-Ching really helped make the action possible in the film. They really pay attention to details and as I said earlier it was great to see them at work. They have such a vast wealth of experience and knowledge and are both really good guys. They always strive to push things and make things better. Collectively, I am very proud of what we achieved in HK.



HKCinemagic: For your next hypothetical project in HK, you'll fit better within the HK style of film-making after this first experience.

Chee Keong Cheung: I think so, absolutely. I learnt a lot in HK and it was a great experience. Personally I was really glad I could speak Cantonese also. It really helped. I'm certainly a lot more familiar with the HK style and pace of film-making now.

PROJECTS

HKCinemagic: A few words on your projects, and their evolution.

Chee Keong Cheung:

-The Grind: The film is currently in post production. I'm an exec producer on the film. It's a British gangster film and it explores the dark and sometimes explosive world of running an East End [London] nightclub.

-Dreams: It's at the script stage and is a project that's very close to me. It's a more dramatic film, with no action, which I wrote and will be directing. The story revolves around a young boy who is diagnosed with a serious illness and how he, his family and those around him, try to come to terms with his condition. It's a coming of age story.



-*Sabina*: It's currently in turnaround and I'd been developing the film as a producer for several years; The film is based on the true story of Sabina Spielrein a Russian Jewish patient, who in 1904, at the age of 19, was referred to Carl Jung. During her treatment, she and Jung would embark upon a passionate and forbidden love affair. We had two-time Academy Award Winner Jack Cardiff on board and Martin Scorsese attached as an executive producer. There's some amazing talent attached but as a dramatic and period film, it's a challenging project to get off the ground within the current market place.

I've also just finished writing a vigilante style action film, which I hope to direct later in the year. I'm very excited about this and there are also a few other projects in the action genre that I'm currently developing with several producers in the UK and US. Hopefully 2009 will be an exciting year.

HKCinemagic: Are you on the lookout for projects that will bring you back to Asia?

Chee Keong Cheung: Yes, definitely. I'd like to do more work in Asia and I am currently talking to *Mike Leeder* about finding other possible collaborations, and projects which can fuse the East with the West. That's certainly an appeal for me and I think given the creative talents from both sides there are many opportunities to be explored.

I only experienced a small taste while in HK but that was certainly enough to make me want to go back. During my time in HK, it really was like a big family. Everyone was so giving. I got to work and direct some great talent both in front and behind of the camera, which was a real honour and privilege and it was certainly a very memorable experience.